

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

IN RE: DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES :
PROPOSED LIHEAP ENHANCEMENT : DOCKET 4290
CHARGE FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2021 :

DIVISION'S FIRST SET OF DATA REQUESTS ISSUED TO
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Issued November 24, 2020
Responses due December 1, 2020

Div. 1-1

The Division understands that DHS provided additional LIHEAP funded grants over the summer months to assist customers in off-setting summer energy bills. Please identify:

- a) The qualifications that were necessary for a client to receive these grants.
- b) The amount of the grants.
- c) How grant recipients were notified of the availability of these grants.
- d) A breakdown, by municipality of the grant recipients.
- e) Whether DHS intends to provide such grants in the summer of 2021.

RI Department of Human Services Response:

- a) Household must have received a LIHEAP grant during FFY 2020 heating season.
Household must include a member who is 60 years or older or household must include a member who is disabled.
- b) \$100 grant per eligible household
- c) A letter was sent to each grant recipient by CAP agency when the grant was processed.
- d) See Table PUC 1-1 Summer Grants by Municipality located at the end of this document.
- e) We are not sure at this time; it depends on funding and capacity.

Div. 1-2

Please update the chart provided in the answer to PUC 3-3 from 2020 program year, issued in 2019, by including the data from 2020.

RI Department of Human Services Response:

Please see Table PUC 1-2 LIHEAP Grants by Municipality by Year located at the end of this document.

DIV. 1-3

In PUC 3-4 from 2019, the PUC asked: “For each of the CAP agencies, if the data is available, please indicate how many applicants were denied LIHEAP funding. And, if the data is available, for denied applicants, please indicate how far above the income limits the applicants were.”

- a) Please provide the data for the 2020 program year.
- b) If denial rationale was tracked in 2020, please provide that data. If denial rationale was not tracked on 2020, is there a particular reason?
- c) Is the DHS, through its CAP vendor, opposed to tacking denial statistics?

RI Department of Human Services Response:

- a) Please see Table PUC 1-3 Number of Denied Applications for LIHEAP by CAP agency.
- b) The software is not currently set up to generate a report of denials with denial reasons.
- c) While DHS is not opposed to having a report that tracks denial reasons, we would need to discuss it with the software provider to see if it is possible and the additional cost, if any.

Table PUC 1-3- Number of Denied Applications for LIHEAP by CAP agency

Applicants Denied FFY 2019 and FFY 2020		
Agency	FFY 2019	FFY 2020
Blackstone Valley Community Action	140	148
Community Action Partnership of Providence	335	592
Community Care Alliance	69	26
Comprehensive Community Action	128	102
East Bay Community Action	135	118
Tri-County Community Action North	180	186
Tri-County Community Action South	118	85
West Bay Community Action	158	138

DIV. 1-4

Was the new Westerly CAP position, anticipated in DHS’s answer to PUC 3-5 from 2019, hired? If so, when?

RI Department of Human Services Response:

In May 2020, Westbay Community Action hired a LIHEAP Community Outreach Coordinator to provide statewide outreach to the communities in Rhode Island. This position is included in Westbay Community Action’s LIHEAP budget to DHS so is paid for with LIHEAP funds. The Community Outreach Coordinator works closely with DHS and each of the CAP agencies. Although an employee of Westbay Community Action, she receives direction for her statewide outreach work from DHS LIHEAP.

DIV 1-5

Were any LIHEAP applications accepted after May 1, 2020 for the purposes of applying for the Arrearage Management Program? If so, how many?

There were 572 applications taken by agencies between June 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020 (off-season) for the purposes of the client getting on an Arrearage Management Plan with National Grid.

DIV 1-6

Please update the chart provided in PUC 3-11, issued on November 12, 2019, for the 2020-2021 LIHEAP season.

RI Department of Human Services Response:

Please Table PUC 1-6 FFY 2020 Estimated Fuel Assistance Budgets by Agency

Table PUC 1-6 FFY 2021 Estimated Fuel Assistance Budgets by Agency

FFY 2021 Estimated Fuel Assistance Budgets by Agency	
Includes CARES	
Blackstone Valley Community Action	\$ 3,244,647
Community Action Partnership of Providence	\$ 5,251,981
Community Care Alliance	\$ 995,624
Comprehensive Community Action	\$ 2,830,519
East Bay Community Action	\$ 3,750,432
Tri-County Community Action North	\$ 3,222,812
Tri-County Community Action South	\$ 3,229,001
West Bay Community Action	\$ 4,351,429
Total	\$ 26,876,447

DIV. 1-7

Please update the chart provided in PUC 3-12, issued on November 12, 2019, for the 2020-2021 LIHEAP season.

RI Department of Human Services Response:

Please see Tables PUC 1-7 a LIHEAP Grants Households FFY 2020 by Poverty Tiers Non-Crisis and Crisis Combined and PUC 1-7b LIHEAP Summer Grant FFY 2020 by Poverty Level of Households.

DIV 1-8

Please provide a summary of the numbers of crisis grants awarded in the 2019-2020 LIHEAP program year by municipality.

RI Department of Human Services Response:

Please see Table PUC 1-8 - FFY 2020 Crisis Grants by Municipality.

DIV 1-9

Has DHS considered requiring the CAP agencies to use a uniform process, including forms and electronic portal for LIHEAP applications? If not, why not?

RI Department of Human Services Response:

All the agencies use Hancock Software to manage the LIHEAP program from client intake through processing of payment processing. All documents that are generated in the Hancock Software system are uniform (renewal applications, confirmation letters, vendor voucher lists, etc.). The agencies also use a common application for new clients, as well as common supporting forms developed by DHS and provided to all the agencies with the LIHEAP Manual each year. Hancock Software is working on developing an online application that can be used by clients to apply for LIHEAP and when submitted will feed into the software system.

This year, to increase access to heating assistance and in response to the situation created by the pandemic, several agencies are using an online portal developed by a different vendor, Fulcimus. The portal does not manage the program like Hancock's software, instead it offers an online LIHEAP application that applicants can complete and upload documents online. The applications can then be viewed and printed by the agencies so they can input the information into the Hancock. The portal gives clients an opportunity to securely apply for LIHEAP on their phone or computer. To date, the agencies that have implemented online application portals for LIHEAP include: CCAP (Comprehensive Community Action), CAPP (Community Action Partnership of Providence), Tri-County Community Action (North and South), and Westbay Community Action.

Going forward, DHS and the agencies will be discussing and evaluating the ease of use for clients and efficiency of using this portal for the agencies. Furthermore, DHS continues to explore all options for managing the LIHEAP program and offering clients ways to multiple secure ways to apply for benefits.

DIV. 1-10

What does DHS understand the top three barriers are to customers applying for LIHEAP? What strategies are being implemented to overcome these barriers?

RI Department of Human Services Response:

1. One barrier that we believe we need to overcome is general awareness what LIHEAP is and how it can help individuals and families. We feel that one way to address this is through community outreach. Working with Westbay Community Action to hire a statewide outreach coordinator was an important step to take to further this effort. This year, despite COVID, we have developed many new connections with health centers, schools, housing developments, and mobile home parks. Part of the challenge with outreach is that many people may not think they are income-eligible for the LIHEAP. In our outreach, we emphasize to our partners the income eligibility for LIHEAP is higher than for other benefit programs. At 60% of State Median Income, a family of four can make monthly gross income of up to \$5,171 to be income-eligible for LIHEAP in Rhode Island. More emphasis on the eligibility for LIHEAP is important particularly in this environment when many Rhode Islanders have become unemployed due to COVID. National Grid also provides LIHEAP information to their customers on their website, in mailers and emails, and through their call center. We plan to continue to work closely with them in this valuable outreach effort.
2. An additional barrier is transportation of applicants, particularly in rural parts of the state. Some agencies have set up satellite offices in hard to get to areas of their catchment areas. However, it is still challenging for people relying on public transportation or family members to drive them. Moreover, during COVID, most agencies are not working with applicants in person, so enrollment events at local senior centers and other places are not taking place. This has highlighted another barrier having to do with applicants understanding and having technology available to apply. While some of the agencies now have online portals available, it does not resolve the issue that some clients may not have access to or understanding of the technology needed to use it. Working with someone in-person is always going to be most effective for some people.
3. A third barrier is that many households with undocumented and documented members are not applying for LIHEAP. According to a recent report by the American Immigration Council, more than 18,000 U.S. citizens in Rhode Island live with at least one family member who is undocumented. LIHEAP is available U.S. citizens in Rhode Island living with an undocumented family member. There is a different eligibility calculation for households with an undocumented member, but some assistance is available. Through our outreach, we would like to make our partners aware of this information so they can share it.

DIV 1-11

Please identify the anticipated amounts to be issued in the 2020-2021 LIHEAP program year for the following:

- a) Primary grants.
- b) Crisis grants.
- c) LIHEAP Enhancement Funds

RI Department of Human Services Responses:

- a) Please see Table PUC 1-11 - LIHEAP Grant Amounts FFY 2021.
- b) The year, deliverable crisis grants will be for 150 gallons of fuel. So, if the price per gallon of heating oil was \$2.00 on the day the grant was authorized, the value of a deliverable crisis grant would be \$300. Utility crisis grants are issued as a percentage of the amount owed to turn the utilities back on capped at a maximum of \$1500 for both natural gas and electricity. This means if an eligible household has an arrearage of \$1000 for natural gas and \$1000 for electricity, they could receive a grant of \$250 for natural gas and \$250 for electricity. Normally the percentage paid is 25% of the balance. However, if a client has defaulted on Arrearage Management Plan or another payment plan, the percentage need may be higher. The Community Action Agencies contact National Grid to confirm the percentage/amount needed for the utilities to be turned on.
- c) The LIHEAP Enhancement grant is to be \$350 in FFY 2021 for non crisis grants.

DIV 1-12

Have any of the CAP agencies moved to virtual meetings to qualify customers for the LIHEAP program?

- a) If so, which CAP agencies are using virtual technology?
- b) If not, why not?
- c) Are there any plans to move to virtual technology given the ongoing nature of COVID 19 and its effects?

RI Department of Human Services Responses:

Please see Table PUC 1-12 below.

Table 2 PUC 1-12 Virtual Intake Meetings at Agencies

Virtual Intake Meetings at Agencies		
Agency	Using it	Plans to Use it
Blackstone Valley Community Action	No	No
Community Action Partnership of Providence	No	Not sure
Community Care Alliance	No	No
Comprehensive Community Action	No	No
East Bay Community Action	No	Yes, in 2021, at request of client.
Tri-County Community Action North	No	Not sure
Tri-County Community Action South	No	Not sure
West Bay Community Action	No	No

There are several barriers to holding virtual intake meetings with LIHEAP applicants at agencies. One barrier is that not all the intake staff members at some of the agencies have the technology on their computers to hold virtual meetings, cameras was one item mentioned. Secondly, some agencies feel that applicants may not be able to navigate how to access virtual meetings and/or may not have the technology to support it. Setting up a phone or computer for virtual meetings can be intimidating to someone who is not comfortable with technology.

Tables

PUC 1-1 FFY 2020 LIHEAP Summer Grants by Municipality

PUC 1-2 LIHEAP Non Crisis and Crisis Grants by Municipality by Year

PUC 1-7 a LIHEAP Grants Households FFY 2020 by Poverty Tiers Non-Crisis and Crisis Combined

PUC 1-7 b – LIHEAP Summer Grant FFY 2020 by Poverty Level of Households

PUC 1-8 - FFY 2020 Crisis Grants by Municipality

PUC 1-11 - LIHEAP Grant Amounts FFY 2021

*Table PUC 1-1
 FFY 2020 LIHEAP Summer Grants by
 Municipality*

Municipality	Summer Grants
Barrington	85
Bristol	277
Burrillville	198
Central Falls	307
Charlestown	127
Coventry	522
Cranston	1277
Cumberland	246
East Greenwich	82
East Providence	731
Exeter	62
Foster	60
Glocester	120
Hopkinton	115
Jamestown	16
Johnston	586
Lincoln	171
Little Compton	46
Middletown	88
Narragansett	115
Newport	186
New Shoreham	0
North Kingstown	354
North Providence	526
North Smithfield	83
Pawtucket	1298
Portsmouth	113
Providence	3254
Richmond	47
Scituate	76
Smithfield	196
South Kingstown	318
Tiverton	332
Warren	224
Warwick	1205
Westerly	402

West Greenwich	51
West Warwick	562
Woonsocket	732
Total	15190

Table PUC 1-2 LIHEAP Non Crisis and Crisis Grants by Municipality by Year

Municipality	FFY 2020	FFY 2019	FFY 2018	FFY 2017	FFY 2016
Barrington	142	142	140	138	144
Bristol	432	491	451	471	504
Burrillville	462	576	450	390	357
Central Falls	837	1052	1080	1103	1175
Charlestown	204	242	249	171	168
Coventry	926	1045	948	808	816
Cranston	2675	3141	2948	2724	2776
Cumberland	504	587	560	570	589
East Greenwich	154	148	121	120	131
East Providence	1272	1425	1319	1262	1344
Exeter	132	144	119	104	106
Foster	108	138	118	96	97
Glocester	257	309	294	227	205
Hopkinton	232	244	212	159	163
Jamestown	25	28	28	26	32
Johnston	1179	1372	1368	1146	1102
Lincoln	320	343	350	358	362
Little Compton	61	66	61	54	53
Middletown	144	167	142	135	141
Narragansett	194	212	213	205	208
Newport	321	376	351	346	360
New Shoreham	4	4	3	4	4
North Kingstown	676	707	653	577	591
North Providence	1042	1194	1141	1065	1043
North Smithfield	149	171	168	164	168
Pawtucket	2844	3355	3473	3598	3838
Portsmouth	195	225	209	196	197
Providence	8764	10371	10666	10272	10227
Richmond	78	103	88	64	71
Scituate	157	201	201	158	134
Smithfield	347	386	357	325	293

South Kingstown	495	533	503	428	400
Tiverton	470	566	527	496	534
Warren	339	400	388	398	426
Warwick	1943	2083	1918	1788	1829
Westerly	731	850	750	690	677
West Greenwich	106	111	106	78	74
West Warwick	1085	1243	1083	935	895
Woonsocket	1498	1754	1366	1391	1567
Totals	31504	36505	35122	33240	33801

Table PUC 1-7a FFY 2020 Non-Crisis and Crisis Combined

LIHEAP Grants Households by Poverty Tiers FFY 2020 Non-Crisis and Crisis Combined					
Agency	Under 75% FPL	75- 100% FPL	101- 125% FPL	126- 150% FPL	Above 150% FPL
Blackstone Valley Community Action	773	972	782	676	1388
Community Action Partnership of Providence	1956	2172	1361	1090	2103
Community Care Alliance	250	330	305	256	419
Comprehensive Community Action	335	511	476	521	1163
East Bay Community Action	414	575	560	548	1308
Tri County Community Action North	252	576	533	595	1344
Tri County Community Action South	374	450	450	428	1150
West Bay Community Action	556	687	692	687	1484
<i>Total</i>	<i>4910</i>	<i>6273</i>	<i>5159</i>	<i>4801</i>	<i>10359</i>

Table PUC 1-7b – Summer Grant FFY 2020 by Poverty Level of Households

LIHEAP Grants Households by Poverty Tiers FFY 2020 Summer Grant					
Agency	Under 75% FPL	75- 100% FPL	101- 125% FPL	126- 150% FPL	Above 150% FPL
Blackstone Valley Community Action	223	531	406	330	585
Community Action Partnership of Providence	605	1195	500	354	568
Community Care Alliance	51	197	151	150	214
Comprehensive Community Action	108	266	247	275	543
East Bay Community Action	127	402	355	383	831
Tri County Community Action North	75	303	285	331	636
Tri County Community Action South	110	267	284	268	662
West Bay Community Action	199	417	433	446	876
<i>Total</i>	<i>1498</i>	<i>3578</i>	<i>2661</i>	<i>2537</i>	<i>4915</i>

Table PUC 1-8 - FFY 2020 Crisis Grants by Municipality

Municipality	FFY 2020 Crisis
Barrington	1
Bristol	31
Burrillville	125
Central Falls	58
Charlestown	20
Coventry	119
Cranston	310
Cumberland	37
East Greenwich	17
East Providence	90
Exeter	26
Foster	17
Glocester	71
Hopkinton	45
Jamestown	4
Johnston	245
Lincoln	32
Little Compton	7
Middletown	8
Narragansett	19
Newport	23
New Shoreham	0
North Kingstown	57
North Providence	155
North Smithfield	28
Pawtucket	202
Portsmouth	13
Providence	1176
Richmond	10
Scituate	52
Smithfield	63
South Kingstown	57
Tiverton	43
Warren	12
Warwick	149
Westerly	111
West Greenwich	26

West Warwick	119
Woonsocket	235
Totals	3813

Table PUC 1-11 - LIHEAP Grant Amounts FFY 2021



RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

LIHEAP Grant Amounts

Federal Fiscal Year 2021

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

LIHEAP GRANTS					
	Poverty Level and Heating Category	Heating Source			
		Deliverables	N/GAS	Electric	Other
A	Up to 75% Federal Poverty Level (FPL)	\$1,201	\$520	\$780	
B	76-100%	\$1,123	\$473	\$709	
C	101-125%	\$1,049	\$430	\$644	
D	126-150%	\$981	\$391	\$586	
E	151% +	\$917	\$355	\$533	
F	Sec. 8 w/ Primary Heating Bill	\$500	\$205	\$310	
G	HIR (Direct payment to household)				\$190
H	HIR (Secondary Electric)				\$125
I	Section 8 HIR (own electric)				\$75

These grant amounts are valid from October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021